



OCTOBER 15, 2004

HEALTH UPDATE

Influenza Vaccine Shortage Recommendations

The national influenza vaccine shortage has caused a critical shortfall in the amount of vaccine available in North Dakota. Currently, vaccine totals are not adequate to meet the needs of the high-risk groups designated by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). In addition, several areas of the state have received little vaccine.

Local public health units and private health-care providers are addressing the vaccine shortage at the local level. Many of them are working together to develop plans for vaccinating high-risk individuals in their areas, and some local health-care providers are concentrating vaccination efforts first on individuals who have chronic medical conditions. The North Dakota Department of Health is not advising providers to turn away anyone in a CDC-identified high-risk group; however, local vaccination plans may vary across the state depending upon vaccine availability.

Based upon CDC recommendations, the North Dakota Department of Health is suggesting that the limited supply of vaccine be targeted to people in the following high-risk groups:

- Children age 6 to 23 months
- Adults age 65 and older
- People age 2 to 64 who have chronic medical conditions, such as asthma, diabetes, heart disease, kidney failure, hemoglobinopathies, immunosuppression caused by HIV or who are receiving chemotherapy
- Women who will be pregnant during the influenza season
- Residents of nursing homes and long-term care facilities
- Children age 6 months to 18 years on chronic aspirin therapy
- Health-care workers involved in direct patient care
- Out-of-home caregivers and household contacts of children younger than 6 months of age

North Dakota currently has about half the vaccine needed to cover all of our citizens in these high-risk groups. For that reason, we are asking healthy people to forgo their flu shots this year. However, healthy people between the ages of 5 and 49 may be able to receive the nasal vaccine (FluMist®) instead of a flu shot. FluMist® can be used to vaccinate health-care workers. Information about ordering FluMist® is available by calling 1.800.877.FLUMIST.

The Department of Health is coordinating efforts to provide necessary information and resources to facilitate redistribution of vaccine to areas of critical shortage.

Further updates will be provided as information becomes available. Current information regarding influenza is available at www.ndflu.com.

Categories of Health Alert messages:

- *Health Alert conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention.*
- *Health Advisory provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action.*
- *Health Update provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; no immediate action necessary.*
- *Health Information provides general information that is not necessarily considered to be of an emergent nature.*

This message is being sent to local public health units, clinics, hospitals, physicians, tribal health, North Dakota Nurses Association, North Dakota Long Term Care Association, North Dakota Healthcare Association, North Dakota Medical Association, and hospital public information officers.